

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UY

SUBJECT: WOLA PRESS RELEASE ON POISONING OF BLANCO LEADER'S
WIFE

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF WOLA PRESS RELEASE:

SEPTEMBER 7, 1978: ASSASSINATION OF PROMINENT DEMOCRATIC
URUGUAYAN LEADER'S WIFE CONDEMNED.
THE WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA (WOLA) RE-
LEASED A STATEMENT TODAY CONDEMNING THE RECENT ASSASSINA-
TION OF THE WIFE OF SENATOR MARIO HEBER, THE AD HOC PRES-
IDENT OF THE NATIONAL PARTY BLANCO OF URUGUAY. MRS. CECILE
FONTANA DE HEBER DIED LAST WEDNESDAY NIGHT AFTER HAVING
DRUNK A POISONED WINE THAT HAD BEEN DELIVERED TO THE FAMI-
LY AS AN ANONYMOUS GIFT. HER DEATH ALERTED OTHER PROMINENT
POLITICAL LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL PARTY WHO HAD ALSO RE-
CEIVED ANONYMOUS WINE GIFTS.

THE NATIONAL PARTY, THE PRINCIPLE OPPOSITION
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PARTY, HAS BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN DENOUNCING THE URUGUAYAN
REGIME. ONLY IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS THE URUGUAYAN PRESS

PUBLISHED A LETTER BY SENATOR HEBER DEFENDING THE EXILED
LEADER OF THE NATIONAL PARTY, WILSON FERREIRA ALDUNATE,
WHO HAD BEEN SUBJECT TO SEVERE CRITICISM BY THE ARMED
FORCES. THE GOVERNMENT THEN REPRIMANDED HEBER BY

CANCELLING HIS PENSION AS AN EX-SENATOR. SUBSEQUENTLY, SENATOR HEBER SIGNED AN OPEN LETTER TO THE GOVERNMENT OF URUGUAY CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN URUGUAY.

"THIS CRIME IS UNJUST AND BRUTAL", SAID JOSEPH T. ELDRIDGE, DIRECTOR OF WOLA, "BECAUSE IT IS A CONSEQUENCE OF SENATOR HEBER'S COURAGE IN DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS IN URUGUAY AND OF THE GENERAL CLIMATE OF TERROR AND REPRESSION THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS IMPOSED. THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION SHOULD DEMAND THAT THE GOVERNMENT FIND THE RESPONSIBLE PERSONS OR OTHERWISE WE MUST ASSUME THAT THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF IS RESPONSIBLE", CONCLUDED ELDRIDGE. END TEXT.

THE FOLLOWING MEMORANDUM WAS ALSO RELEASED BY WOLA:
BEGIN TEXT: BACKGROUND : CECILE FONTANA DE HEBER WAS ASSASSINATED IN MONTEVIDEO ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1978. SHE WAS THE WIFE OF SENATOR MARIO HEBER, A PROMINENT LEADER OF THE NATIONAL (BLANCO) PARTY, AND IS CURRENTLY ONE OF THE THREE MEMBERS OF THE POLITICAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE OF HIS PARTY. UNDER THE PRESENT REPRESSIVE CIRCUMSTANCES, THIS COMMITTEE ACTUALLY RUNS THE PARTY. MRS. HEBER HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN POLITICS. IN 1976, DURING THE FUNERAL OF THE ASSASSINATED SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF UNCLASSIFIED

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REPRESENTATIVES, MR. GUTIERRES RUIZ, SHE WAS ARRESTED FOR ATTEMPTING TO COVER THE COFFIN WITH THE FLAG OF URUGUAY. THE FACTS: IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS THE PARTY TRIUMVIRATE OF WHICH MR. HEBER IS A MEMBER, WAS VERY ACTIVELY DENOUNCING THE URUGUAYAN REGIME. ON JULY 18, MR. HEBER AND THE OTHER TWO MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE SIGNED AN OPEN LETTER TO THE GOVERNMENT. FOLLOWING THE LETTER, MR. HEBER AND TWO OTHER DEMOCRATIC LEADERS RECEIVED AT THEIR HOMES AN ANONYMOUS PRESENT OF A FEW BOTTLES OF WINE. ATTACHED TO THE GIFT WAS A LETTER CONGRATULATING THEM FOR THEIR ACTIONS. IN URUGUAY, THIS IS A CUSTOMARY WAY OF EXPRESSING SUPPORT. MRS. HEBER WAS THE FIRST ONE TO TASTE THE WINE. SHE DIED INSTANTANEOUSLY. THE OTHER BOTTLES WERE TESTED AND THEY ALL CONTAINED A STRONG POISON. THE URUGUAYAN GOVERNMENT IMMEDIATELY RELEASED A COMMUNIQUE ACCUSING THE INTERNATIONAL "CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT THE GOVERNMENT" OF THE CRIME. MR. HEBER IS A POPULAR LEADER IN URUGUAY. THERE ARE NO GUERRILLA OR EXTREMIST GROUPS OPERATING IN THAT COUNTRY. MR. AND MRS. HEBER WERE CLOSE PERSONAL FRIENDS OF JUAN. END TEXT. JUAN REFERS TO JUAN R. FERREIRA. CHRISTOPHER

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